A Sweet Year

Story: A Sweet Year
Storylink: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7700888/1/
Category: Golden Sun
Genre: Romance/Humor
Author: Datenma
Authorlink: https://www.fanfiction.net/u/422344/
Last updated: 01/02/2012
Words: 8223
Rating: T
Status: In Progress
Content: Chapter 1 to 1 of 1 chapters
Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: Isaac/Ivan A modern AU following Isaac's winter holiday adventures.

Chapter 1: A Sweet Year

A/N: Um...at least I made it before the Chinese New Year? Between running around with the parents, a death in the family (...there's a reverend in my family? where did they go wrong with me?), and the addiction of Atelier Rorona and Final Fantasy XIII (...so many of my friends complained about it...but it's sooo good. Hope's so cute. I'll never listen to them again.)...this story was later than I hoped it would be.

Disclaimer: Camelot owns Golden Sun! -sad face-

So, this is a semi-angsty (not too much), romantic, funny-ish Christmas/New Year's story. Set in modern day Japan...did mini-research (concerning what ward Tokyo Tower is in... :3 I didn't know it was so close to the water) but I'm not 100% on if people can go in Tokyo Tower anymore. I remember reading (in Sailor Moon no less) that they stopped broadcasting from Tokyo Tower...but that doesn't mean people can't go there? Blame Tokyo Babylon for their trip to Tokyo Tower...

I hope everyone had a safe and happy New Year's. Let's make this an amazing year.

Read, enjoy and review.

A Sweet Year

Christmas shoppers hurry past the store window, loaded down with bags full of items from the high end local stores—all of them are in little groups; high school girls giggling together, middle-aged business women shopping on their lunch breaks, and young men dragged along by their

girlfriends. Even as reluctant as they follow, the men smile at their girlfriends.

"See something you like?" I glance over at Garcia as he leans over the counter, writing something in the store log next to the register.

I chuckle softly, taking my scarf from its hook and slipping it over my head, "Not particularly. I'm headed home—my parents are driving into the city to spend the holidays with me. Mom wanted to go to the Shrine on New Year's."

"She's wanted to do that since you moved into the city. Are you going to come to our house for dinner?"

"We'll probably just stay home—Mom prefers to cook than to be cooked for." His sister steps out of the backroom, pulling her apron on and tying it behind her back. She blushes when she spots me, her eyes lightening up a little. I turn quickly before I roll my eyes, reaching for the door.

"Ah, Robin, you're leaving?"

"My shift's up." I step out, throwing the end of my scarf over my shoulder and ignoring her as she calls after me. She's had a crush on me since I met her brother seven years ago. I don't know why, I barely say more than four words to her at a time.

Three days until Christmas, the air is thick with merriment and winter chill. I cup my hands over my mouth and breathe warm air into them, rubbing them together quickly as I head for my apartment. My parents are driving in from the countryside; it'll be the first time they've been here since they helped me move in.

I shove my hands into my pockets as I walk against the flow of shoppers headed deeper into the city, taking a deep breath and shutting my eyes. There's a hint of snow in the air, the clouds overhead gray and puffy. Still, more people come.

A bell jingles as a shop door flies open, a blur jumping out and slamming into me. I stumble back, barely getting my hands out of my pockets in time to throw them behind me to brace my fall. The concrete is cold beneath my hand, jolting me into wakefulness.

An instinctive burst of annoyance and anger runs through me as I look down at the body crumpled on my lap. "Would you watch where you're going…?" The words lose meaning as violet eyes turn up to me, tear swirling in their depths.

"I-I'm so sorry. I was in a hurry to…" He shakes his head quickly, "Are you unhurt?" His voice is strange—sweet and soft, with a hint of worry.

"Yeah…I'm fine." He climbs off me, holding out a hand. I brush my hand on my pants before taking his hand. It's small in mine, slender fingers curling around the back of my hand as he helps me to my feet. He's short, the top of his head barely reaching my shoulder.

He smiles up at me, the same hint of worry in his voice present in the expression. "I'm glad…please excuse me." He steps around me, running down the street. I turn, watching him until the crowd swallows him whole.

He was crying.

I run a hand through my hair, tousling the ends that fall across my nape. Crying people always make me

uncomfortable. All that's left is the lingering scent of chocolate. I shake my head, hurrying to my apartment.

Their beige car isn't in the parking lot when I step up to the building—probably stuck in the holiday traffic. I fumble with my keys as I head up the stairs, nodding to the old woman who lives next door. She clicks her tongue, calling for the cat sleeping on the outer railing. I slip a hand under the cat, holding it against my chest as I pass it to the woman. "Such a helpful young man…" She mutters as she steps back into her apartment.

I unlock the door, smiling faintly and tossing the keys onto the hallway table. A tell-tale beep from the kitchen warns of a missed call and a message on the answering machine. I rest a hand on the wall as I kick off my boots, resting them near the door. I shrug off my jacket and scarf, hanging them on their hooks and stepping into my slippers.

I hit the play button as I pass the answering machine, opening the fridge and frowning at the scant amount of food there. Working part-time at Garcia's parents' store and attending classes at the university doesn't leave a lot of time for cooking. I usually buy premade meals from the convenience store down the street. Mother wouldn't hear of it, of course, so I didn't bother stopping on the way home.

The first message is from Garcia's mother, reminding me to tell Mother we're invited for dinner at their house. The machine beeps and plays the next message.

"Robin Watanabe? This is Dr. Nomura; your parents have been in an accident, please come down to J Hospital as soon as possible."

W-what?

I cross the room, hitting the play button and skipping the first message. I play it over and over again, until all I can hear is a pounding in my ears.

My heart.

"Dammit." I kick off my slippers, struggling into my boots and coat, stumbling as I turn back to grab my keys off the stand. I try to wave for a taxi but I'm already halfway to the hospital before I spot a free one.

The nurse at the information desk gives me a dirty look as I skid to a halt, "I'm looking for Dr. Nomura." I gasp out, just now feeling the stitch in my side.

She pushes up her glasses, looking at her computer and taking her sweet time—giving me too much time to think about the message. An accident. They were in an accident. I should have taken time off—taken a train out to the country instead of them coming here.

"Fifth floor." I turn for the elevator even as she calls after me, "He's in surgery right now!" I step inside, pacing the small area as it inches to the fifth floor. After what feels like a lifetime, the bell dings and the doors slide open.

A pair of double doors greet me at the end of the hall, a sign that read Surgery in Progress glowed deep red. I rush down the hall, a man stepping out just before I reach the door. "Robin?"

"Dr. Nomura?"

He nods, gesturing towards the nearby chairs, "Please, sit down." I don't think I can.

I bite back the unspoken words and sink onto one of the couches as he sits across me, "Your parents—Kyle and Dora have been in a car accident. They are still in surgery right now…" He trails off and I shift, pressing the heels of my hands into my thighs.

"Are…" The words die in my throat and I bow my head, digging my nails into my knees. *Are they going to make it*? Such small words…how could they weigh so much?

The man sighs, "We're doing all that we can…but it doesn't look good." He hesitates but suddenly lays a hand on my shoulder, "I'll make sure you're informed on their condition." He stands, heading back to the emergency room.

I fall back against the seat, pressing my hands against my face. A car accident. But Dad's always so careful. Something distracted him—or someone ran into him.

They shouldn't have been driving out here—they didn't have to drive out here if I had just taken the train. Why didn't I take the train?

Snap out of it, Robin. They're in surgery now. The doctors here are the best in the Prefecture. They'll be alright. They have to be alright.

I take another deep breath, my heart slowing down to something close to normal. That's when I notice violet eyes on me. The boy blushes, glancing down quickly before looking up again and waving sheepishly, "I didn't mean to stare."

"You don't have to apologize—I did make a spectacle of myself."

He smiles suddenly, tilting his head, "I wasn't apologizing."

I chuckle in spite of myself, "How bold."

He stands, coming around to sit on the bench across from me, "You're…here for your parents…?" This time his voice carries a hint of apology. He's obviously not the type to eavesdrop—or maybe that's just the impression his demure manner gives.

I sigh, leaning back and resting my arms across the back of the couch, "Yeah…they were driving in from the country to spend the holidays with me."

"I'm sorry…" He whispers, his bangs falling into his eyes as he bows his head. Watching him is a nice distraction from the anger and fear threatening to broil up in the pit of my stomach. His hair looks soft—silky, the type of hair you only see on idols—honey blonde touched with strands of dirty blonde. His skin is pale; he probably spends a lot of time inside reading or trapped in cram school. He seems the type to care about studies.

"They're in surgery now…" I keep watching him. For a reaction?

"O-oh, my sister is as well." That's right. He was about to cry when we bumped into each other. This must be why he was in such a rush.

"I'm sorry."

He waves his hand quickly, "No, it's—" The double doors swing open and a nurse steps out, looking me over and smiling at the boy, walking over quickly, her soft shoes silent on the floor.

"Ivan, your sister is out of surgery. They've moved her to a private room—she's resting now. You can wait with her if

you'd like."

He stands, "Thank you…" He starts to follow but pauses, glancing at me and smiling gently, "I…I hope your parents will be okay. Good-bye."

"Good-bye…" My eyes follow him as he disappears down the hall with the nurse. The woman called him Ivan. A usual name—though he had unusual eyes, unless they were colored contacts. Jasmine mentioned those being popular now. Maybe he's a foreigner.

I shake my head quickly, running a hand over my eyes. Thinking about picking up a guy while my parents are in surgery. I must be a horrible person.

"Robin!" I start, looking over my shoulder to see Garcia standing there, looking as if he ran the whole way here. Alex and Mary were hot on his heels, the blue haired man still in his university uniform. He straightened his tie and ran a hand through his tousled hair, glancing around the waiting room. It was empty, of course, except for a couple of potted plants, rows of semi-comfortable chairs, a long coffee table, and some end tables.

"They called my parents when your…" Garcia shifts, rubbing the back of his neck. "They called me at the shoppe and I hurried over."

Mary steps over, leaning down and slipping her arms around my shoulders. I blink, catching a whiff of her perfume. It's light and floral with a hint of fresh ocean water. I keep my hands at my sides but it doesn't seem she'll let go anytime soon. I slip an arm around her, resting it across the small of her back.

"We ran into him on our way home." Alex sinks into the chair across from me. He was Garcia's tutor while he was high school, now in his last year of university. "When he told us what happened, we came with him. I didn't think you should be alone."

Mary finally releases me, rubbing at her eyes before sitting next to her cousin, "How long have they been in surgery?"

I shake my head, looking over my shoulder at the clock, distracted by Garcia as he began to pace the hall. "An hour…maybe a little more. The doctor spoke with me when I first showed up… he said it didn't look good."

Garcia stops, dropping into the chair next to me and resting an arm across the back of the chair. "The doctors here are good…the best." He tilts his head back, trying to think of what to say. He was normally eloquent, if not limited in speech. He said what he wanted to say, damn the consequences. It was one of the reasons we got along so well. This…was too much, too personal. Words wouldn't cut it.

Another hour passed, mostly in silence. Mary leans her head on Alex's shoulder, falling asleep some time ago. Alex doesn't seem to notice as he flips through a university text book, talking to Garcia absently. I tune them out, staring at the coffee table. Somehow a ladybug had gotten in, slowly crawling along the edge.

The double doors swing open again and Dr. Nomura strides over, startling the insect and it flies off towards one of the potted plants. I stand, my heart leaping into my throat. The man shifts uncomfortably, not meeting my eye for a long moment. "I'm sorry, Watanabe."

Time must have stopped. Everything became muted and dull. My vision shifted as someone pulled on my arm—I couldn't feel the hand that did so. A field of blue monopolizes my vision—Mary's hair. She's hugging me again but I can't feel it.

I glance at the doctor to see his lips moving but I can't hear his voice. Is he really saying anything? Alex pulls the man aside, speaking with him quietly with a grave expression on his face.

"Robin." Garcia's chocolate colored eyes appear and the world comes screaming back to me. Mary's shaking against me, her forehead resting on my shoulder as she clutches at my sleeve. I bite down on my bottom lip, bringing an arm around her and dropping my head on her shoulder as the tears burn my eyes.

He steps over and without a word, rests a hand on my head and wraps an arm around my shoulder, pulling us against him. With two of my closest friends holding me, I cried for the first time since I was a kid.

The funeral took place in our hometown—a small village in the countryside, surrounded by mountains, forests, and rice fields. Alex helped with the arrangements to have their bodies transported and I ordered a train ticket home. Mary insisted on coming with me but I managed to talk her out of it somehow.

I get back on the train after arguing with Gerald about staying in the village for New Year's. I sink onto the bench, leaning my head against the back of the chair and closing my eyes.

The bench groans as someone takes the seat beside me. "Excuse me, could you…" Gerald. "What are you doing? Get

off, the train's about to leave."

"I know. I'm coming with you." He grins, ruffling my hair. "Mom said you shouldn't be alone right now. Since you won't stay here, I'm coming with you."

I frown, pushing his hand away and trying to fix my hair, "Where will you stay?"

"Robin, c'mon! We're like brothers—brothers! You have to put me up!" He huffs, "I certainly can't go to Garcia. He'd eat me alive."

I sigh. The reason I wasn't staying in the village for New Year's was because I didn't want company. It seemed I didn't get a say in this. "Fine—but don't get in my way. I still have to work at Garcia's parents' place."

"I won't get in the way. Just think of it as an extended sleepover."

"That's what worries me…"

"Eh? You say something?"

"Um…check out the water buffalo…"

He leans across me, looking out the window, "Where?" This is going to be a long ride.

We reach the city at night, Gerald forcing me to switch seats as he plasters his face against the window, staring at the thousands of lights from the skyscrapers and streetlamps. "It's like having the stars bottled up…"

"But you can't see the real stars."

He manages to tear himself from the window, grinning at me, "If you miss seeing the stars so much, you should just move back home."

"I'm going to the university here…" Besides, there's nothing left for me there now.

He waves a hand, looking back to the window, "You've always been so studious—you can't always have your nose in a book, you know. That's a good way to lose it."

"You do realize people don't actually stick their noses in books…" I shake my head, "This is our stop." I take up my bag, leading the way off the train.

He looks over the crowd, furrowing his brow, "Is there anyone to pick you up?"

"My apartment is close to the station, I don't need anyone picking me up." We'd barely gone a block when someone called out to me. I turn back, Gerald taking a few more steps before realizing I wasn't with him. Mary hurries through the crowd wearing a new long winter coat, Alex having no trouble keeping up with her. Gerald's jaw drops when he sees Mary and I clear my throat. "Mary, Alex…what are you doing?"

The girl smiles gently, catching my hand in both of hers, "Alex finished his textbook…he insisted on getting another." She pauses, rubbing the back of my hand with her thumbs, "How was the service?"

"They would have liked it…" I trail off, painfully aware of the people walking around us. Gerald nudges me a little too excitedly. "Mary, this is my friend Gerald. He decided to come with me."

Mary smiles sweetly, bowing to him a little, "It's nice to meet Robin's friends—he's popular at the university but he hasn't made any new friends…I was starting to worry about him." She laughs playfully, "At least he has Alex and Garcia. Oh, we're planning on going to Tokyo Tower on New Year's Eve before heading to the Shrine. It'd be wonderful if you two could join us?"

"I don't know, Mary…" There's nothing to celebrate. Gerald tugs my arm, looking at me with pleading eyes. I frown faintly, shaking my head, "Alright…we'll meet you there. What time?"

She looks back at Alex, "Garcia and Jasmine are meeting us there at 6—the fireworks start at 6:45."

Gerald jumps, "J-Jasmine is going?"

"Oh, that's right…Garcia and Jasmine grew up in the same village as you." She smiles, "It'll be a nice reunion for everyone."

"Not really, he—"

He nudged me in the ribs, "You don't have to tell everyone that story." He hisses.

Mary tilts her head, glancing between us before smiling, "I'm sure you're both tired from the train ride. We'll see you on New Year's Eve then." She kisses my cheek, bowing to Gerald again and loops her arm through Alex's heading in the opposite direction.

Gerald stood next to me, his mouth dropping open again. "She's…something else."

"That's what you said about Jasmine—that's an insult to Mary." I step past him.

"Hey, c'mon. I'm sure she doesn't even like you anymore. What about Mary? Are you dating her?"

I roll my eyes. Jasmine had confessed to me during our last year of junior high. I told her I couldn't accept her feelings because I was attracted to boys. She, of course, retaliated by spreading this all over school. Gerald seems to have forgotten.

"I'm not dating Mary, we're good friends."

"What about that guy she was with? Alex or something." He hurries along behind me. I'm sure he hasn't realized we've turned into the apartment building.

"Alex is her cousin—they've always been close, more so now that her father passed. They take care of each other." I take out my key, unlocking the door and stepping inside, kicking off my boots. "Don't tell me you're jealous."

"I-I'm not jealous of her cousin…" He rubs the back of his neck, "So, do you like her?" He shuts the door behind him, stepping out of his sneakers and pushing them against the wall.

"I'm not interested in her romantically, no." I glance at him, "You should think about it carefully before you try to woo her."

His face turns as red as his hair, "I…" He puffs his cheeks, "Why's that?"

"She's a smart girl—not like Jasmine. She's actually thoughtful." I turn around, tapping a finger against his

shoulder, "If you hurt her, you'll have to deal with me and Alex."

"You know, I think living in the city made you even scarier…"

Gerald hogged the shower for over an hour on New Year's Eve. I beat on the door, "Would you hurry it up! We're going to be late."

"There's plenty of time." He chimed in a sing-song voice. I groan, slapping my hand against the door one last time. As much as I thought I didn't want company, having him here has been just the distraction I need. I know it's horrible to admit, but I haven't thought of my parents since the service. Tonight, though, at the Shrine, I'll say a prayer for my mother.

When he finally finishes, we board the train and get off at the station near Tokyo Tower. The structure looms in the distance. Even with tall, glistening buildings surrounding it, the tower stands out beautifully. Gerald whistles appreciatively, tilting his head back as we reach the bottom of the tower. "It sure is tall…"

"Robin! Gerald!" Mary hurries over, throwing her arms around me, "Have you been waiting long?"

"We just arrived." I nod to Alex.

He shifts, "Have you seen Garcia?"

I blink, "Not yet…"

He brushes a hand through his hair, "He's bringing his new boyfriend along to this." Mary smiles kindly, patting her cousin's arm.

Gerald blinks, "E-eh? You mean Garcia is…" I clear my throat again, elbowing Gerald in the ribs and shaking my head. He grunted, rubbing his ribs, "Er…you mean he'll be along soon then?"

"Who'll be along soon?" Garcia strides over, a handsome golden-eyed man with him. Jasmine hurries along behind them, hugging her brother's arm. Garcia raises an eyebrow, "You dragged this country bumpkin with you?"

"Who's a country bumpkin!"

"He insisted on coming…" I cross my arms, "I'm sure his sister forced him to do it."

"S-she had nothing to do with this. My mom told me to come—she was worried about you." He huffed, "Who's this?"

Garcia smiles suddenly, slipping an arm around the mysterious man, "This is Picard." He introduced us one by one, Alex giving the man a strange look that Picard tactfully ignored, smiling patiently. "Looks like the elevator is free, shall we head up?"

I stop the elevator halfway up and step off. "Robin?"

"I want to take a look around—I'll be up before the fireworks start."

Jasmine starts to protest but Garcia holds out a hand. "We'll be sure to save a spot for you." He presses the button and the doors slide shut again.

There weren't many people on this level—most went to the top floor for the best view of the fireworks. I cross the platform to the railing and leaning against it. A little boy runs from the elevator, giggling and pointing at the lights

excitedly, his parents hurrying over and taking his hands gently.

I would have been spending New Year's Eve with them. I would have been spending Christmas with them if…

Maybe this was a bad idea. I should just go to the Shrine now and get it over with. I have to tell them or they'll come looking for me.

Taking a deep breath, I pull away from the railing and head back to the elevator, pressing the up button. It dings after a moment, sliding open to reveal the last person I expected to see. Ivan. He's wearing a white pea coat, with a light blue tartan scarf tucked under the lapels. He smiles, stepping over to give me room even though he's the only one on the elevator.

I step on; noting the button for the top floor is already lit up. I lean against the wall next to him, "I didn't expect to see you again, Ivan."

He blushes, glancing up at me, "You remember me? My name too…" I look him up and down. Definitely my type. Why does the timing have to be so horrible?

"Of course I remember you. The first time we met, you slammed into me, and then…" I trail off, folding my arms across my chest with an inward sigh. And then we met again at the hospital.

He worries his bottom lip, "Your parents…"

"Didn't make it." We fall into an uncomfortable silence as the elevator slowly rises. Christmas music plays softly on the speaker, a familiar tune that Mary tends to hum around this time of the year. "And your sister?"

He blinks, looking up at me in surprise, "My sister?"

"You were there for her…"

His cheeks color, "O-oh…she went into labor…" He smiles gently, tilting his head, "She…had her baby that day…" How fitting…

"She's doing well?"

"Y-yes…I'm on my way to meet her and my brother-in-law right now…" He points up, indicating the top floor. "Um…I'm sorry—" The elevator lurches suddenly, pitching him forward into me. I catch him as I fall back, reaching out and grabbing for the railing. By the time I hit the floor, the lights shut off, a red emergency light coming on and blinking slowly. "W-what's happened?"

"A power surge…?" I glance out the window, the wrist of my right hand stinging from when I grabbed the railing. The only lights in the city come from the cars and the occasional emergency light. "I'm sure they'll fix it soon…"

"Ah…the stars…" He presses a hand to the glass, looking up at the dark sky. With the city in darkness, the normally hidden stars come out blazing, filling the sky. He's straddling my lap, completely oblivious of the position he's in. Of course not, with my luck, he's straight. "I've never seen so many before…"

"Never?"

He glances up at me, smiling shyly, "I grew up in Shinagawa…we moved to Minato last year because of her marriage…"

I smile faintly. A city boy through and through. He doesn't seem like it at all. "We didn't introduce ourselves properly in the hospital…my name's—"

"I know your name." His cheeks color—or maybe it's just the emergency lights. "I remember the doctor saying your name…I really shouldn't have been eavesdropping…I'm not normally so rude."

"But it's different with me?" I know he's blushing this time. He bows his head, worrying his bottom lip again and I feel a bothersome warmth in the pit of my stomach. Now's not the time. Of course, I can't tell my lower half that.

"And you called me bold." He shifts, trying to get comfortable. I catch his waist in my hand to still him, unable to stop myself in time. "Ah, I'm sorry, am I heavy?"

"No, that's not it…" I slide my hand away slowly, mustering up enough self-control not to run it down his thigh. "It'd probably be best if you got off me though." He slips off, sitting on the floor next to me, keeping close as he hugs his legs to his chest, trembling a little. "I'm not mad…"

"It's not that." He presses his forehead to his knees, "This is…kind of one of my greatest fears—being trapped on an elevator."

I glance over my shoulder, "Well…you picked the best elevator to be trapped in. Look at that view…"

He lifts his head slowly, "The city looks so lonely without the lights."

"You really think it looks lonely?"

"Don't you?"

I smile, touching the winter chilled glass, "I grew up in the country…places look most alive when they're lit up by the stars—not artificial lights."

He laughs softly, "Oh? I didn't think country boys were so romantic."

"I may be an oddity."

He relaxes slowly, folding his legs under him. "The power's taking a while to come back on." He pulls back his sleeve, pressing a button on his watch, a pale blue light coming on. "The fireworks are supposed to start soon."

"If they need to get a crew out to restore the power, it'll probably take a while. Maybe they'll cancel the fireworks."

He looked up at me, clearly distraught by this, "Do you really think they'll cancel them?" He sighs, "I always look forward to seeing them…this is the first time we've come to Tokyo Tower to watch them."

"They'll reschedule them if that's the case."

"But it won't be the same on any other day…" He rests his hands behind him, the tips of his fingers brushing against mine. His fingers twitch slightly but he doesn't apologize or move his hand away. "Though, it could be a lot worse…I could have been stuck in this elevator by myself. I'm lucky you got on when you did, Robin."

My heart does an excited summersault at the sound of my name leaving his lips and I fight the urge to slap my chest to berate it. "I never thought anyone would be happy to be trapped with me in a small space."

"But you're so handsome…I'd expect a lot of people to just at the chance of being locked in a room with you." He starts to pull his hand away, most likely to cover his mouth but I catch his fingers in mine, holding him still. "I…I'm sorry… you're…"

"It's okay."

A pop like a toy gun sounds in the distance, followed by something screaming through the air. Just when everything falls silent again, colorful lights explode in the night sky. Another bang comes, followed by another and another until the sky is full of raining, sparkling lights. He presses his free hand against the window, his face lit up by the fireworks.

"Amazing…"

He glances up and it's in that moment that I realize I leaned towards him, bringing our faces close. Close enough I can smell his shampoo—fresh, soapy and faintly sweet. And chocolate. He smells like chocolate.

His eyes drop to my lips and for a dizzy moment, I could hear his heart beat. Nervous? Excited? He wets his lips, the motion too tempting to let pass.

I cup his cheek, not to keep him from backing away but to comfort him. He reaches up, catching my wrist gently. He's bound to feel my heart pounding under his fingertips. I close the distance between us before my conscience can talk me out of it. It draws a pleasurable gasp from the teen. The sound is the only encouragement I need. His lips are warm and soft under mine; moist from where he ran his tongue along them.

I slip my tongue out, tracing the path his tongue took just moments ago. He shudders under me, a hand reaching out

and clutching at my jacket's lapel, pulling me closer. Unable to fight it, I place a hand on his waist, rubbing his side gently.

Coming here wasn't a complete waste.

Before I can get the buttons of his coat undone, the lights come on along with the instrumental music of the radio. The elevator lurches again, quickly moving to the top floor. He pulls away as the doors slide open, looking at me with a perplexing expression—hurt? Embarrassed? He grabs his scarf from the floor and runs out, disappearing into the crowd.

What did I do wrong?

"Robin?" Mary peeks in, blinking, "We were worried about you. How long have you been stuck in the elevator? Are you okay? Your cheeks are flushed."

"Y-yeah, I'm fine…" I touch my lips, sighing and standing up.

"Did you kiss that boy?" She whispers as I step out of the elevator.

"How…?"

She smiles sweetly, looping her arm through mine and leading me through the crowd to the window, the fireworks lighting up her face. "You looked rather cozy with him when the elevator doors opened up, your lips are red, and your clothes are mussed."

I roll my eyes, leaning against the railing, glancing over my shoulder, trying to find him. "You should be a detective."

"You think so?" She leans against me a little, "What happened?"

I sigh, glancing down at my hand, "I met him that day…he was at the hospital for his sister. He's so…different from the guys I've dated—innocent but…smart at the same time." I rub my finger along my lips, "He knew just want to do to get me riled up." Mary blushes and I laugh, trying to keep the bitter note out. "Too much detail?"

She smiles, "Mm…I wouldn't mind a little more." She pats my arm gently, "It isn't like you…kissing someone you've just met."

"I know…I don't know what happened. He was just…" I sigh again, bowing my head, "Too good to be true."

She rubs my back, "There, there…you've been under a lot of stress. Maybe you needed to meet him tonight."

"For a fling? I didn't even get to—"

"Ah, if you finish that sentence, things might get awkward." She glances around, "Why don't we go to the Shrine? I think Alex is a little depressed seeing Garcia so lovey-dovey with his boyfriend."

"He hasn't gotten over him?"

Mary smiles gently, shaking her head, "No...You know, he still keeps some of Garcia's practice tests in his room. Please don't mention it. You know how proud he is. So, let's rescue my cousin before he has any more time to wallow in self-loathing."

"Has it gotten to that point?"

"I believe so. You're going to wallow soon too if I let you contemplate too much." She catches my hand, tugging me along until we find Alex and Gerald lingering in the corner. "Are you ready to go to the Shrine now?"

"Yes, we should get going." Alex pauses, spotting Garcia and Picard nearby. "Are we going to leave them here? I don't think we'll be able to draw them away…"

"I'll tell them where we're going at least." Mary pulls away, tapping Garcia's shoulder.

Alex looks me up and down, raising an eyebrow, "You look like you've just made out with someone."

Gerald gasps, "You said you were just friends with her!" The outburst earns him dirty looks from some of the families and his ears turn red.

"Her? I thought you said you were his best friend. Don't you know Robin's interested in men?" Alex gives me a puzzled look before glancing back at Gerald. We watch as his face shifts from bewilderment to enlightenment and back to bewilderment a couple of times.

"Y-you mean, you were making out with a guy just now?"

"Not just now." I sigh, shaking my head, "Don't worry yourself, Gerald. I don't want you to pull a muscle."

Mary hurries back, "Are you ready to go?" She blinks, "Did something happen?" Jasmine starts to come over, waving to me excitedly. Mary and Alex loop their arms through mine before she can reach us, her face drooping a little.

"Are we going to the Shrine?"

"Yeah, you can stay behind with your brother if you want."

Jasmine shakes her head quickly, "No, I want to come with you." She looked at my arms, still disappointed. She steps onto the elevator first and I glance at the crowd one last time, hoping to see Ivan again. He's nowhere to be seen, the poor lighting and moving people the perfect hiding place.

After standing in line for two hours, we're finally at the foot of the Shrine. I tug the rope to ring the bell and clap my hands together, closing my eyes. Normally, this would be easy—some silly pray of getting a decent boyfriend that year, perfect grades, or something else trivial. Nothing came.

What would Mom wish for?

Probably for me to have a safe trip home for the summer. I sigh, dropping my hands and stepping down, sticking my hands into my pockets. I find a crushed pack of cigarettes there. I hadn't smoked in months. I start to tap one out but a tutting stops me. Mary sighs, taking the pack from me and frowning at it, "I thought you quit."

"I deserve it after the past week and a half."

I hold my hand out for it but she slips it away into her purse, "There are better ways to deal with your grief, Robin…we're here for you. You just need to talk with us."

"I don't want to talk…" I sigh, running my hands through my hair, "I don't know what to say. I'm twenty-years-old and I feel like an orphan. I've been living on my own since I graduated high school. I shouldn't feel like this."

"Your parents died, Robin, it's natural to hurt…you don't have to be a tough guy all the time."

"I'm not trying to be—"

She catches my cheeks in her hands, pinching them hard before rubbing, "You are. You always try to take care of us. It's time you let someone take care of you. It's not so horrible having someone look after you. We are your friends." She bops me on the head, as gently as possible, "Stop bottling your emotions. This is why you can't keep a boyfriend."

"Mary…"

"As much as you don't want to hear it, it's true. For people who don't know you very well, you're unapproachable."

"Unapproachable?"

She pats my arm, "We'll work on it. That can be your New Year's resolution. Now, let's see if we can get Alex to buy us some champagne and celebrate like everyone else our age."

"By drinking until we can't feel anything?"

"I wouldn't go that far, Jasmine might jump you if she doesn't pass out first." She laughs, walking back to the street with me. Alex is waiting there, watching Jasmine with a bored expression.

"She's not drinking with us."

Gerald comes running down the stairs to join us, throwing his arm around my shoulders and ruffling my hair. "Are you ready to go? I heard someone mention champagne."

Alex raises an eyebrow, "Champagne?"

Mary, Jasmine, and Gerald are passed out on the floor, Alex drinking lazily on the couch, slowly drifting off. I slip out

before midnight, pulling on my scarf. It's snowing, the delicate flakes gathering on the frozen ground, turning everything white. I feel around in my pockets for the cigarettes before remembering Mary took them.

I head home to start the New Year alone the way I wanted.

With a new semester starting, I quickly bury myself in my studies. Between that and my part-time job at the shoppe, I barely find a free moment to think about my parents or "boy that got away" as Mary had so lovingly dubbed him.

Before I know it, the streets are decorated for Christmas once again. I expect to feel the tale-tell pang in my chest but nothing comes. Had I gotten over their death? Without the proper grieving Mary insisted I needed so many times.

Maybe I just can't feel anything anymore. I know that's a lie.

I sigh, rubbing the back of my neck, watching people trickle past the store window, once more loaded down with meaningless presents. The bell jingles and I sigh again, turning my head, "Welcome to The Glass Rose where all your dreams are sure to come true."

There's a familiar laugh and I lift my head, finding Mary standing there, lowering her fur-lined hood. "Hello, Robin."

"Ah, Mary…you're doing your Christmas shopping?"

She nods, smiling, "Actually, I came to ask for a favor." She rummages around in her purse, taking out a note and passing it to me, "Gerald's coming in on the train this evening…I wanted to get him some chocolates but I won't have time to go to the shoppe and go to the station to meet him at the same time. I was hoping you'd go for me…I've

written the directions down for you…" She flutters her eyelashes at me, "I hope it's not too much trouble."

"You know batting your eyelashes at me won't do anything."

She laughs softly, "Are you sure? Will you go for me?"

I sigh, taking the note and checking the directions, "I know where this is. It's on my way home." I slip the paper into my back pocket, "So, you and Gerald have been getting along?"

She smiles warmly, pressing her fingers together, her cheeks coloring a little, "Yes…he's so sweet…Alex doesn't quite approve of us dating but…I'm sure he'll warm up to him in time, don't you think?"

"Alex and Gerald…they're opposites. I think it'll take a lot for him to warm up to Gerald—but he does care for you. If Gerald makes you happy, Alex won't stop you from seeing him."

"Thank you, Robin." She kisses my cheek, "I'll see you later. Thanks for going to the store for me." She waves, pulling her hood up again and stepping outside.

The back door opens, "I thought I heard the door."

"Mary was here." I pull off my apron, hanging it on the rack and coming around the counter, taking my jacket down. "I'm headed to the store for her. She's picking Gerald up from the station."

Garcia shakes his head, "I never thought those two would hit it off."

"You know Gerald, he's gentle—like a big teddy bear. He's a bit unruly and rough around the edges, but Mary's patient

enough to handle him."

"You watch people too much." He pulls his hair back into a ponytail.

"I watch my friends too much." I correct, throwing the edge of my scarf around my shoulders, "I'll see you later."

"Robin, my mother's invited you over for Christmas…you shouldn't be alone."

"I'll think about it." I step out as he starts to say something, "I'm okay, Garcia." The door shuts slowly behind me, snow already starting to fall from the gray sky. Heading down the street, I make my way to the chocolate shoppe—*Le Petit Fleur*. Strange name for a chocolate shoppe.

It's a couple of blocks from Garcia's shoppe, nestled between a café and a bookstore, a little beige flower painted on the window. A wind chime sounds as I step inside, the strong smell of chocolate filling the room. It's warm inside, my boots sinking into the plush carpet. A small radio on the counter plays J-Pop, an excited female announcer coming on after each song to announce the next. "I'll be right with you~" Someone calls cheerfully from the back room.

"Take your time." I lean down, inspecting the decorative desserts displayed in the glass cases.

"Did you find something you like?"

"Ah…it's for a friend, actually." I sigh, "It all seems a shame to eat something so pretty."

"But everyone puts so much effort into them so that people can enjoy them. The chocolates would be sad if they weren't eaten."

"Honestly, I'm not much for chocolates…" I straighten slowly, starting.

Ivan.

His eyes widen, face turning beet red. I shift, glancing down at rubbing the back of my neck, feeling naked under his stare. "I…"

"I'm sorry…!" He bows quickly, "Back at Tokyo Tower…I just ran out without saying anything…I…shouldn't have done that. I was just so surprised."

"You…shouldn't be apologizing. I…took advantage of you." I chance a glance at him, studying his face. "I was still reeling from my parents' death…"

He shakes his head, "I would have pushed you away if I didn't want you to kiss me…" He tucks his hair behind his head, his hand shaking, "I was just surprised when the doors opened…I was worried everyone would see. Not that I was ashamed…It was my first kiss…" His voice fades to a whisper but I can hear it over the music. It sends my heart racing but I manage to keep myself in check even as my legs ache to carry me to him.

I catch his hand to still the shaking, "Ivan, did you like it?" He blushes more, opening his mouth to say something but nodding instead. "And me?"

He looks at me, searching my eyes, "From what I know about you…" Add up the time in the lobby and being trapped in the elevator, we'd spent an hour together, if that. Yet, I'd felt strongly enough to kiss him. This wasn't just lust.

He grips my hand gently, "I like you…and I want to get to know you better…"

I catch myself smiling as I lean across the counter, "I was born in the spring—I'm 21-years-old and in my second year of college, I work part-time at The Glass Rose, and you've left an impression on me since we met."

He laughs a little, "It must have been when I ran into you. You left an impression on me too…"

"I think we should take this reunion as a sign…"

"Oh?"

"Would you spend Christmas with me?"

He smiles, leaning towards me, "What about New Year's?"

"Are you asking?"

"You…" I chuckle, closing the distance between us and stealing his lips. It took a year to find him again, a year lost to burying myself in studies and work. I'll have to make up for lost time.

-Fin-

-bows- I hope it was alright.